TV: CBS News Is Presenting Two Hour-Long Programs on the Assassination of President Kennedy

By JOHN J. O'CONNOR

Tomorrow and Wednesday at 10 P.M., CBS News is presenting the first two hours in its four-part series on "The American Assassins." These first installments deal with the assassination of President Kennedy. The others, still to be scheduled, will examine the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the shooting of Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama.

In 1967, CBS News devoted four hours to the Warren Report, and concluded that the commission, in endorsing the single-killer theory that involved Lee Harvey Oswald, probably offered the American public the best explanation "based on available evidence." Since then, more evidence, most notably concerning the autopsy on President Kennedy, has been made available, and various conspiracy theories of the assassination have gained renewed strength with the sensational revelations of assorted government operations following the Watergate explosion.

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Dan Rather, series narrator, concedes that "to discover a conspiracy . . . would have been a journalistic coup almost beyond imagining" for the CBS "inquiry." According to CBS polls, only 15 percent of the American people now believe the report of the Warren Commission, while 68 percent believe that Oswald was involved with others in the assassination (interestingly, only 45 percent want the investigation reopened).

But CBS News does not discover a conspiracy. The inquiry has made a variety of tests on its own and has recruited a number of expert individuals and agencies. Could the type of rifle used by Oswald be fired three times in five and a half seconds? Yes, it could. In fact it could be fired with fair accuracy three times in less than five seconds. It is possible that there was only one gunman? Yes. Did all the shots come from the rear? Yes.

It is not that some of the theories supported by the Warren Commission aren't difficult to prove, the CBS inquiry explains, "but there is less evidence for any other theory." The inquiry does, however, suggest that Warren Commission investigators were hampered by "calculated, very likely illegal cover-ups," and that Congressional investigations are needed to explore alleged roles played by the Central Intelligence Agency or the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Cuban groups or organized crime.

"The American Assassins" fails to bring off its journalistic coup but it still manages to serve a purpose. Theories of conspiracy in the assassination of President Kennedy have become fodder in TV entertainment during recent months. From David Susskind to Geraldo Rivera, the talk-show hosts have been making the most of a sure-fire emotional issue. In bringing some facts to bear on the feverish speculation, CBS News is less sensational but more telling.

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